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SUBJECT: Villagers Clash with Construction Workers at Site of
Guangzhou's Future Biomedical Industry Park

REFERENCE: A) Guangzhou 353; B) Guangzhou 322; C) Guangzhou 06
32380; D) Guangzhou 06 32306; E) Guangzhou 06 32264; F) Guangzhou 06
13564; G) Guangzhou 06 11879; H) Guangzhou 06 11684; I) Guangzhou 06
2194; J) Guangzhou 04 16347

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect
accordingly.

11. (U) SUMMARY: One villager died and others were injured when a
fight broke out between construction workers and villagers on
Guangzhou island, the site of a planned biomedical industry park on
the outskirts of Guangzhou. This incident comes one year after
police arrested three villagers on the island following protests
over land use and compensation. Guangzhou island is adjacent to
University City, where villagers and homeowners have clashed with
the government over land requisitions for a similar development
project. END SUMMARY

A Traffic Accident Blows Up

12. (U) On March 20, villagers gathered at a construction site after
a dump truck driven by a construction worker hit a villager. The
incident quickly escalated and at one point 30-40 workers with iron
rods fought against the villagers, according to western and local
media reports. One villager died and 15 villagers and workers were
injured. Riot police closed off access roads to the island and
arrested some of those involved. Construction has stopped on the
island and police have visited twice to remove a memorial put up by
villagers for the person who died. The district government has set
up a special task force to investigate the incident.

Site of Land Dispute

13. (U) Guangzhou island, located in south Guangzhou in a tributary of
the Pearl River, is the site of a planned biomedical industry park.
The city government requisitioned 330 acres of land on the island
several years ago and has demolished a number of homes since then.
According to western and Hong Kong press reports, villagers continue
to claim that the land seizure was illegal and the government
provided compensation at rates below market value. The district
government claims that some villagers moved onto the land after the
purchase in order to extort money from the government. Police
arrested three of the villagers last year following a protest on the
island over the development plans and compensation.

Ties to a Nearby Hot Spot

14. (SBU) Guanzhou Island is adjacent to a larger island that is home to Guangzhou's University City, a new development that includes 10 satellite university campuses and six sports stadiums. The University City project generated protests by villagers when it was initiated in 2003, leading to several violent confrontations. In addition to villagers, a community of 200 homeowners on the island, mainly artists, engineers, and professors, demonstrated against the land seizure and compensation rates (Reftel J). One of the homeowners, Samsun Wu, told Congenoff that government compensation was below market value and that their efforts to build a legal case went nowhere. (Famed human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who is now under house arrest, represented the group.)

15. (SBU) Approximately 400 villagers in two villages continue to live on the University City island in defiance of government orders. Police have forcibly removed the villagers' temporary shelters on several occasions, but the villagers returned each time. According to Wu, villagers on Guanzhou island and the University City island are in communication with each other and likely share experiences in how to deal with authorities.

Comment: A Sensitive Subject

16. (SBU) Although a traffic accident is the official explanation for this confrontation, villagers' lingering resentment over the conditions of the land deal seems to be behind it. Protests over land seizures in Guangdong are a regular occurrence (see reftels), particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas such as the Pearl River Delta. Without an effective legal system to serve as an outlet, farmers and homeowners are often left frustrated. Local officials are under coming under increased pressure to avoid these types of situations as the central government emphasizes social stability

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under the principle of a "harmonious society." As the rural population becomes more interconnected and thus more aware of their options, however, they may be less willing to back down.

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